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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF
INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, December 24, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HOMEMADE CANDY." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Today my broadcast concerns something that's a part of every merry Christmas. You find it in Christmas stockings -- in boxes tied with bright ribbons -- it's good to eat -- and you can make it yourself. It's candy, of course.

If groups of young people meet at your house during the holidays, sooner or later they'll get to the kitchen to make candy. For with congenial company it's as much fun to make the candy as it is to eat it.

On occasions like this it's always easy to arouse plenty of enthusiasm. But it's a little more difficult to find someone who can really make creamy fudge or chewy caramels.

Many times I've seen gay crowds start out confidently to make candy and end eating from the pan with a spoon. They enjoyed it that way all right and that's the spirit I like to see. But such a failure needn't have happened. Candy-making is just a matter of knowing the rules and applying them.

Take Esther for instance. Her crowd always lets her make the candy because they say she always has such good luck. But it's not luck at all. Esther knows the principles of sugar cookery.

One night I watched Esther at work. She was making chocolate fudge. When I came into the kitchen I found her mixing the sugar and chocolate in the top of a double boiler. The other five boys and girls were cracking nuts.

On a table nearby was the milk all measured and ready to pour. After the chocolate had melted and she had mixed it well with the sugar she poured in the milk. She stirred this until all the ingredients were well-mixed and set it over direct heat to cook.

At this point the boys and girls cracking nuts offered to help. They wanted to stir the candy. But Esther explained that making good fudge was just as much knowing what not to do as knowing what to do. She told them that during cooking it was better not to stir fudge at all.

The crowd continued to crack and chop nuts. They were eating such a large proportion of them that it took quite a time to get a cupful. Pretty soon, after the mixture had boiled, Esther thought it might be getting done. It wasn't boiling so high and looked thicker.

So she tested it with a candy thermometer. She put the mercury bulb of the thermometer down in the boiling mixture but was careful not to let it touch the pan at all. Then she leaned down to read the temperature at a level with her eye. All the time the bulb was still in the boiling mixture.

When the fudge reached the temperature specified in the recipe, Esther took it off the stove to cool. As candy cooks the moisture evaporates and the sugar in the mixture becomes more concentrated. As this sugar gets more concentrated the temperature goes higher. So at a given temperature the candy reaches a certain concentration. That's the moment to stop the cooking.

Persons who work out recipes experiment until they find the proper temperature for the candy. If the candy never gets as high as it should, then it is likely never to harden. If it gets to a higher temperature it will be harder than it should be.

It was many minutes between the time when Esther took the fudge off the stove and when she was ready to beat it. This was the interval that tried the patience of the rest of the group. They didn't understand why they couldn't beat the candy right away. Again Esther explained. She told them that if they beat the fudge while it was hot the crystals that formed as it cooled would be large. Then they could feel them on the end of the tongue when they ate the fudge.

But by waiting until the fudge got about lukewarm, smaller crystals would form as they beat it. It would take longer to beat it, but it would be worth it.

Esther won out. They waited until the mixture was lukewarm, then added the salt, vanilla, and butter. Then they all took turns beating. Finally the mixture began to get creamy. When the whole amount had crystallized they poured it into a buttered pan spread with the chopped nuts. In a short while the fudge was hard enough to cut and eat. I tasted it and it was some of the creamiest, smoothest fudge I have ever eaten.

After that demonstration I came away knowing that Esther's candy-making success had nothing to do with luck. She knew the "why's". She knew enough not to stir fudge while it cooks. She knew how to tell when it's done. She knew that it should cool before beating. And she knew that she should beat it until the whole mixture became creamy.

In addition, she knew the elementary points in any candy-making. She got a good recipe and didn't change it. She used a pan big enough to allow for boiling and thick enough to prevent the chocolate from scorching.

I've never seen her make caramels. But I've tasted them and apparently she knows the rules for making them also. Of course those rules are different in some ways from those for fudge-making, because caramels are a different kind of candy.

